

Robin Williams says parenthood put an end to his own Peter Pan syndrome ...and brought him back from the brink of disaster

LIKE Peter Pan, Robin Williams wanted to stay young forever.

The star of Steven Spielberg's hit movie *Hook* had no trouble relating to his character Peter Banning, the uptight businessman who discovers he was Peter Pan after Captain Hook (Dustin Hoffman) kidnaps his children to lure him back to Neverland.

Robin's struggle with growing up began when he shot to stardom in the hit TV series *Mork And Mindy*, and the 39-year-old admits he turned to cocaine and alcohol.

What forced him to change was facing the responsibility which put an end to the "Peter Pan syndrome" — parenthood.

"Before my first son was born, I had a choice — either take note of this and enjoy the experience, or be

wasted through it," Robin tells TV WEEK. "I thought, 'There's a switch — Daddy's going to throw up on the baby!' I didn't want to miss it because as exhausting and painful as it is many times, there's something extraordinary about it and I didn't want to blow it. That's why I cleaned up before Zac was born — on my own. I didn't have to go to any meetings. I just didn't want to be one of those 'hey, Daddy loves you and sorry I woke you up but I have to leave again' fathers."

Robin says his own father, a car salesman, was a lot like Hook's Peter Banning.

"There was a time when he was on the road a lot and would come back with great tanks and guns, but he suffered from exhaustion, was burnt out and didn't have time for me," Robin says.

"The wonderful thing was that my parents were old when I was born, so my father retired when I was about 15 and I got to spend time with him then, and that saved it."

Robin says he has been present for the birth of all his children — Zachary (from his first marriage) and, from his three-year marriage to Marsha, Zelda, 2, and five-months-old Cody.

"You go through the whole birth

thing and they hand you the child — if you don't drop him, because he's still wet — and it's intense! When Zachary, 8, was born, he peed on me, which I thought began a wonderful experience for all of us. It connects your life, it puts life into perspective; the moments past and present and even future start to fit together.

"When Cody was born, I thought I'd be like, 'Oh, well, another baby', but they held him up and he was a member of my family, and the more in my family, the larger the time travel I can do!

"I can be two when I play with Zelda and eight when I'm with Zachary, and I'm not sure yet about Cody." He adds, laughing: "I don't know how to be a baby, except if my wife would give up the other breast for a little while!"

Because of the timing of the American film releases, Robin did publicity back-to-back for *The Fisher King*, which earned him an Academy Award nomination, and

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Hook, co-starring Julia Roberts, Dustin Hoffman and Bob Hoskins.

He's now at work on a new film, *Toys*, directed by Barry (Bugsy) Levinson, about an ex-general who takes over a toy factory and starts to build functional war toys.

"I play the son of a man who used to own the factory and has to save the world," Robin says, hoping to avoid more press work for a while.

"These press things come back-to-back and the journalists are saying, 'Please take some time off — we don't want to talk to you again; we know about your family!'" he adds, tongue-in-cheek. "So I go and have another child.





'Honey, there's another press thing coming up — I want to have something new to show the people!'"

These days Robin is still a joker, but he knows he doesn't have to always be "on".

"Through Marsha and some wonderful friends, I realised I didn't have to always perform," he says. "It was like coming back. You can still perform and do all those wonderful things but then you have another place, which is just you."

He says it is no coincidence that he is always drawn to play characters who are "outsiders" — as in *Dead Poets Society*, *Awakenings*, *The Fisher King* and *Hook*.

"Do I envision myself that way? I guess as a comic you're kind of slightly above a leper in terms of the way people look at you," he says.

"It's always been an outside deal and you're always disturbing the water. It isn't something I go out of my way to look for in a movie role, but I like to balance out the Arnold Schwarzenegger movies."

"My characters are heroes of conscience and have chosen a path just as gruelling as blowing people away. Maybe that's what I like playing — people who provoke."

But he agrees there are also darker elements to *Hook*.

"Actors always say that playing the darker side of characters is more interesting. There are nasty sides to us all but we bury them, and we all have kind of damaged parts of ourselves," he says.

"Peter Pan, even in the book, was a self-centred nine-year-old who didn't care about other people. He was quite lethal and a violent, nasty little boy who hated his parents, so it was interesting stuff to explore. Fortunately, I'm at a point in my own life where I felt safe enough to look at it."

Although Robin is hoping to take some time off with his family when he finishes *Toys*, he admits the temptation to work is always there.

"My wife always says, 'Look at Mel (Gibson) and Peter Weir — they take a year off', but it's hard because I get offered these incredible things to do."

"There is a movie called *Being Human*, which takes place over 6000 years, and I get to play six different people."

He chuckles and adds: "Do I want to take a year off now? Then my wife hears about this and says, 'Oh, you bastard!'"

*From Jenny Cooney
in Los Angeles*

TV WEEK, 2/5/92 11